

are you still mine? by jacobby

Series: [hungered for your touch \[2\]](#)

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“I just really thought we were supposed to get better at this whole life thing once we left Derry, Eddie. As much as I hate to admit it, it’s like we never grew up. You never grew up. I never grew up. I guess it just sucks that leaving Derry meant all of *this*.”

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AKA: Richie tries to balance the life he lived in Derry and the life he made for himself out of it. Eddie doesn't make it very easy for him.

1. Chapter 1

Author's Note:

this took me a LOT longer than initially planned and i really really wanted it out of my system. anyways, unbeta'd so there may be mistakes. im mostly done with the entire thing. just a little bit of editing left.

ENJOY! (if there's anything i forgot to tag, please let me know :^)

Eddie is pacing.

Richie hears it as he makes his way to his own room. He stumbles along the hallway, clutching at the railing when he hears the sound of Eddie's footsteps, heavy on the carpeted floors. He pauses, does not do a lot of thinking because being drunk meant less time to think and more time to act. And maybe he's a little *too* drunk and slightly giddier than usual. Maybe it's the fact that Stan and Eddie had come back to life. Maybe it's because the Losers are all together again after years of separation. Maybe it's the fact that It is finally dead.

Maybe all of that is just leading him up to this moment. He finally feels brave. He finally feels good. He finally feels powerful and *daring*.

So fucking *daring*.

Well, daring enough to stop outside Eddie's door, slightly ajar and teasing Richie to barge in, but not daring enough to actually knock on it and yell Eddie's name.

He just stands there, just before the threshold, just before the doorframe, always *just before* where Eddie is concerned.

Just before asking Eddie to dance. Just before Eddie was about to leave, Just before Eddie died. Just before Eddie came back to life.

Where the 'just before's' lay, Richie will always be there, walking the line between the sure and the unsure.

“Hello?”

The unfamiliarity in Eddie’s voice freezes Richie on the spot. It takes him a second to realize that Eddie isn’t speaking to him, and yet he’s rooted where he stands. *There’s this little thing called privacy, Tozier.*

But he supposes some twenty years away from the man you’ve been in love with your entire life does that to you. Twenty-something years of Eddie barely existing in his life, and him in Eddie’s. Suddenly, all his decency is out the window while he imposes himself in Eddie’s space again.

“I’m fine, Myra.”

Ah yes, the wife. Someone Richie hates himself for being envious of, all things considered.

Now, based on Eddie’s accounts, Myra Kaspbrak is a deplorable woman. At least that’s how Richie interprets her. Eddie himself doesn’t really frame her as an awful person on purpose, but tales of his wife turned into tales of his mother and Richie could barely keep up and tell the difference between who did what and who said which. Because overall it’s the same fucking bullshit: hospitals, pills, and that fucking *aspirator*.

It makes Richie’s skin crawl, makes him want to punch Eddie in the face to make him snap out of it, to remind him what it was like to be a kid running away from his prying mom’s (wife’s) eyes and act like he’s indestructible.

They’re both indestructible if the last few nights proved anything.

After what they have been through, Richie knows they can, at the very least, give themselves that.

“Yes, Myra—I—”

Richie presses an ear, even though he does not hear most of the conversation because Eddie ever rarely gets a word in.

There’s the pacing again, always with the pacing, Eddie Kaspbrak. Pace, pace, pace. Pace, and then run. *Run as far away as you can. Run*

until you're out of breath. Run so your asthma doesn't catch up, because it's not really asthma, is it, Eddie Kaspbrak? It's not asthma, so you better run.

"I—Myra—Marty. I'm sorry for putting you on voicemail," Eddie says, flat and fast and not sounding very sorry at all.

Then, the pacing stops.

Run away, Eddie Kaspbrak.

"They're my friends, Myra."

Run away with me.

"I'm not just gonna—"

No, Eddie is not just gonna. Because he is more than the asthmatic, neurotic, sick, delicate boy Sonia or Myra or whoever else claims him to be.

There is a huff, loud and clear and so very *Eddie*. "You're not listening—" A sigh of defeat, and Richie's heart sinks.

"We'll talk about when I get back to New York." Silence, and then, "Rich."

"How'd you know I was here?" He takes a peek at the room.

He searches for Eddie's face, but is met with the silhouette of his slumped figure instead. Eddie is sat on the bed, forearms resting on his knees, his phone on his right hand, and his eyes staring at the bathroom door. The bathroom lights are on, but its illumination merely grazes Eddie's socked foot, the edge of the bed, and the floor.

Richie can't make out his expression, can't make out the creases and folds of his clothes. He's a little stumped with what to do or how to react, so he just goes in, one foot after another, a little too carefully and a little too slowly. It's stupid how calculating Richie is at the moment. He finds it stupid that he's reduced to a lovesick thirteen-year-old at the mere sight of Eddie. Because really, it's a little degrading. But, he knows he'd take on all types of degradation for

him.

“I can hear you breathing from the other side of the door, numbnuts.”
Case in point. “How much did you hear?”

“Hm?”

“Stop playing dumb. I know you heard the phone call.”

Richie crosses his arms, still searching for Eddie’s eyes. “Does it really matter, Eds? We all know you married your mom anyway. It’s all the same shit.” And he doesn’t mean for it to come out so full of spite, but it does anyway.

Eddie shrugs, “Guess not. And, not my name.”

“Yeah, I heard you the first time thirty years ago.”

The silence stretches, and it’s been a recurring theme, Richie notices. One moment they’re all up in each other’s business, the next they’re avoiding each other’s gazes like their life depended on it. It’s deafening, the silence. Because Eddie may not speak, but he still hears Eddie in his mind. Loud and booming and *laughing*. He laughs and laughs and laughs like he hasn’t got a problem in the world.

I didn’t practically marry my mom and I’m free to do whatever I want and I’m on my bicycle and pedaling pedaling pedaling. Look, Richie! No hands! Lemme see you top that, Trashmouth. Top that, Richie. Try and top it. Top it. Top me—

Er...well. The Eddie in Richie’s mind laughs, amongst other things.

Before it gets more awkward than it already is, Richie clears his throat. “Glad your back, Eds.”

Come back to me, Eds.

“I’m glad I’m back, too.”

I will.

Richie hums in response. “You have to leave so soon, though?”

Eddie makes a sound from the back of his throat. He lays himself down on the bed from where he's seated, and stays still for a few seconds. "Yeah...wife and all."

Richie scoffs. "Sure."

"Fuck off, Richie. Literally, fuck off."

"I just really thought we were supposed to get better at this whole life thing once we *left* Derry, Eddie. As much as I hate to admit it, it's like we never grew up. You never grew up. I never grew up. I guess it just sucks that leaving Derry meant all of *this*."

"The fuck, Rich?"

"What?"

"You're drunk. Go to sleep."

"What? Am I wrong?"

"Really? You think staying in Derry would have been fucking *better*?"

"At least we wouldn't have forgotten about each other. And maybe we could have—"

Promise me you'll come back, Eds.

I promise.

Eddie is quiet for a moment, and when he speaks, it's low. "I just *died*. God, I just died because of this stupid fucking town." A pause, then a whisper, "Stan killed himself because he remembered Derry. Do you have any idea what it feels like to die, Richie? Because it's awful. Sorry if leaving this dumpster fire of a place is somewhat of a priority to me right now."

Richie winces. "Yeah." He looks down, barely seeing his shoes. He is *not* about to throw up. No siree. All the alcohol *will* remain in his system, thank you very much. "Sorry."

Eddie groans. "Rich," he says, hand held up to his face, getting ready

to do that chopping motion he always does. But he drops it back down. He sighs deeply, and raises his head just enough to look at Richie's general direction. He pats the empty space beside him; a soft *thud thud thud* by his hip.

Richie does as he's told, just like he always does. Eddie would tell him to come over because he couldn't sleep, because he had a nightmare, because he was crying too much from how shitty his mom had been treating him. And Richie would raise hell to climb through Eddie's window any time he's needed, his parents and Sonia Kaspbrak be damned.

He settles beside Eddie. Not far, but not quite touching either. Just enough that if Eddie ever wants to reach out to Richie, if his skin still itches to come in contact with Richie's, he'd be able to do so freely.

Because in the end, Richie is still wholly Eddie's. And nothing, not even death, will ever change that.

There's that silence again. Their gazes are fixed on the ceiling. They are still. Richie has both his hands intertwined and resting on top of his belly.

That night is threatening to repeat itself and he is still as fearful of what's to come just as he was when he was a teenager.

"We just gonna lie here and wait for your flight tomorrow?" Richie asks when *everything all at once* threatens to overcome him. "Like a bunch of idiots."

Eddie doesn't speak. Instead he turns towards Richie, both hands tucked under his head as a makeshift pillow. He sighs.

Richie could feel Eddie's breath on his skin, on his lips. It mildly smells like alcohol and toothpaste.

"Eddie, what are we doing?" He could hear the *thump thump thump* of his heart under his ribcage. He doesn't look at Eddie, though his head twitches to the side, daring him to turn it against his own will. He scratches at his head, the pressure on his skin hard to force him back to reality. The reality where Eddie is married, where Richie is drunk,

and that doing something brash can only result in something incredibly stupid.

“I don’t know,” Eddie replies after a while.

Eds—

I promise—

“Listen—”

“Look—”

And they both shut up.

So Richie does the next best thing.

“I should go to bed.” He stands without waiting for a response.

“Yeah, me too,” Eddie replies, slowly. “Early day tomorrow.”

Which isn’t really the answer he wants to hear, but he shrugs and walks away. Doesn’t look back should he risk doing something really stupid. *Stupid stupid stupid*. “Bet it is. Night, Eds.”

“Night, Richie.”

Richie leaves the room and closes the door behind him.

It takes Richie a while to adjust.

While leaving Derry for the second time, he knows that his old life is bound to mix with the current life he made for himself.

Granted, his old life has his friends in it. The friends that would have made his twenties and thirties and his career as a standup comedian and his too large too beautiful too soulless apartment meaningful. He wouldn’t have had to be haunted by the fact that his shelves or his walls were devoid of any photos from his childhood or even his adulthood. He wouldn’t have to wonder why guest rooms were always prospects whenever he moved from one apartment to the

next.

So he looks through his storage closet and checks the various boxes he kept around but never bothered opening after he first moved in. He sees some photos, and a few mixtapes from the 90s. He sets them up in his living room.

When he comes across a cassette tape with Eddie's name written with a Sharpie on it, he shoves it into a drawer by the TV console.

There's still the emptiness to deal with. One he doesn't want to cover up anymore with a few bottles of beer, or wads of cash, or quick blowjobs in the—

Whoa there, Trashmouth. Getting ahead of ourselves again, aren't we?

So his two lives are about to collide. *Abso-fucking-lutely nothing to worry about, Tozier.*

His job might not be here waiting for him anymore, but that's a different can of worms. One Richie can leave in his metaphorical pantry to ferment for a while longer, which, gross, but hey, it's probably not the grossest thing in there.

Fair enough, though. He finally has his friends who are either willing to open the can for him or throw it out altogether.

The first few weeks, they spend a lot of time on Skype or FaceTime or whatever application allows them to stick their tongue out at Richie. It's an easy rhythm to get into, despite the loneliness increasing tenfold every time Richie presses the end call button.

On a particularly lousy day, Richie has been nursing a bowl of oatmeal for almost two hours now when his laptop rings. He mutes the TV and moves from the living room to the breakfast nook in the kitchen where his laptop sits. He answers it, expecting the group to be incomplete.

"Hey!" He points at Stan's frame on his laptop. "Why's Stan here?"

"Oh, I can't be here?" Stan asks, incredulous with the accusation.

“You never answer when I call the group.”

Stan shrugs. “Sucks to be you, then.”

Richie only wags a spoonful of oatmeal at them, then flips them the bird when he shoves the spoon into his mouth.

“Rich, look, it’s a crocodile!” Mike exclaims with too much delight and not enough concern that there’s a loose crocodile wherever he is. It’s far behind him, and the angle of his phone is just so that Richie can see a large field with a few people on them, some taking pictures of the animal, others not minding it at all. Mike’s face is blurry and tiny on screen. “If it had only been a crocodile in the Derry sewers.”

“Would’ve been easier to kill,” Ben says.

“Bill would end up becoming a different kind of writer, then,” Richie comments, “more boring, but maybe his endings wouldn’t suck so much.”

“Beep beep, Trashmouth. I know wuh-wuh-where you live,” Bill tells him.

Just then, Richie can hear a bark of cuss words. In her frame, Bev looks slightly taken aback, but amused all the same. She’s in the passenger seat of a car. Richie assumed she had her driver with her, but that might not be the case after all, unless her driver sounded exactly like their absent little friend.

There’s a quick motion in her camera, blurring her screen altogether. “Woops,” she says. “Dropped it.”

“Was that Eh-Eddie?” Bill asks.

“Yeah, we’re out.” She picks up her phone and moves the angle of the camera to show Eddie on the driver’s seat, muttering under his breath.

“That explains why you and Ben are on separate screens,” Stan says.

“Ben’s a big boy; he can handle himself. Eddie and I were out shopping. Thought I’d spoil our risk analyst just a bit.”

Eddie shifts his gaze for a while to look at the camera. “Rich, are you eating *oatmeal* for lunch?”

“Technically, it’s breakfast. I’m having your mom for lunch.”

A round of *beep beeps* echo in his speakers.

Eddie only makes a face when he focuses on the road again.

While Richie is thankful that his friends are a lot more present, finding Eddie’s place in his life proved to be a lot more difficult now that Richie has a more profound sense of agency. Eddie himself is making it a little hard for Richie—barely replying to Richie’s mundane texts about a dog he just saw or a mom joke he just thought of. Barely even making an appearance in the group calls.

Eddie chalks it up to being busy. What about, he doesn’t say.

Richie chalks it up to himself always being in the group calls. Why so, he doesn’t understand.

“Speaking of lunch, Eddie and I are having it in Le Bernardin,” Bev says, pointing the camera back at her.

At least she doesn’t have the same problem as him.

“Ben, my darling, if you’d like to join us, the reservation is in thirty minutes.”

Ben smiles and nods. “I’ll be there.”

“Well,” Richie says, suddenly defensive. “Bill and I are eating at some fancy shmancy French restaurant, too. For dinner.”

“What?” asks Bill.

“What?” asks Eddie off-screen, but louder. Less confused and more disbelieving.

He feels a bit of his lunch threatening to crawl back up his throat, out of his mouth and to the sink, with its middle finger pointing right at him. “I said I’m taking Bill out to dinner.”

And so that's how Richie Tozier ends up taking off one button-up shirt after another, deciding that one isn't his color, one had too much, and one had too little. He finally settles with a dark blue turtleneck underneath a light blue suit jacket; a look he's done before for a private meeting. Safe to say that if paparazzi gets a glimpse of him, he'd at least look decent.

That's how Richie Tozier battles with himself on whether he should take his car or call a cab or cancel entirely. Because one problem might lead to the next, and the next problem might lead to a beer bottle might lead to shots shots *shots*. And the last thing he needs is a hangover and a half.

That's how Richie Tozier ends up with Bill Denbrough at a restaurant fancier than his usual taste, his car parked down by the road, in the midst of a crisis so personal, he feels like a shell carrying around the actual Richie Tozier, sulking or vomiting or both, from point A to point B without much regard for whatever else that came round the corner.

It's quite the turnout, if he's going to be honest with himself. Three months back in L.A. and he's already chumming up with one of Hollywood's leading horror writers—no chumming up actually needed, of course, but articles and online speculations might beg to differ, and they can beg all they want where Richie is concerned.

Attempt to resurrect his career? Comedian speculated to star in new Bill Denbrough film

Maybe, maybe not. That might be an actual conversation they need to have if Richie wants to keep his apartment.

Richie Tozier's Meltdown, a publicity stunt for upcoming role in new Bill Denbrough adaptation?

Whoever thinks puking on stage is a good publicity stunt is either a moron or a really clever person that the world has yet to catch up with.

Comedian Richie Tozier has romantic affair with horror writer Bill Denbrough?

Hah! Next question.

“Bev helped you out?” Bill asks. “You look guh-good tonight.”

“She helped me in spirit.”

Bill scoffs. “Okay—whatever that means.”

When their food arrives, Richie makes it a point to have their photo taken and sent to the Losers group chat. Bev and Eddie aren’t the only ones capable of going out like functioning adults, thank you very much.

Most of the replies are along the lines of ‘both of you look handsome tonight,’ none of which are from Eddie, who hasn’t replied at all.

Richie waves it off, swallowing down his disappointment with a glass of water.

“You sure you don’t wuh-want some?” Bill points his almost empty glass of wine at Richie.

Richie shakes his head, one hand clutching on his glass of water and the other on his fork. He shoves a piece of chicken in his mouth and doesn’t stop chewing.

“Last time I had a drink, I had too much,” Richie says. His thought goes back to the night he spent in Eddie’s townhouse room. “I guess I just don’t wanna do something stupid tonight, Big Bill.”

Bill shrugs and doesn’t push further. “Alright.”

So, Richie adjusts, and then some.

“I was thinking,” Richie starts, piece of chicken still in his mouth. He swallows carefully. “I was thinking about getting into therapy.”

“Yeah?” Bill’s eyes perk up. He cocks his head slightly to the side, the fork of mashed potatoes halfway to his lips set down and forgotten. “Since when?”

Richie waves a hand in front of his face. “When Bev told us she’s

getting a divorce?” He makes a face. Bev’s stories about Tom Rogan left a sour taste in Richie’s mouth, and even the mere implication of his existence always makes him feel a little foul, and a little mad that there isn’t much he can personally do about the guy. “I don’t know. It was like—uh—saying ‘fuck you’ to whatever bullshit she’d been through. You and I can both agree that Bev—she deserved that, man.”

Bill nods. “Right. You deserve that ‘fuck you’ as much as Buh-Bev does, Rich.”

The back of Richie’s neck is warm all of a sudden. “Yeah,” he says sheepishly, “you, too, Bill.”

“If you need a list of therapists here in L.A., I’m your guy.”

“You’re in therapy?”

“Yeah, Rich, I’m in therapy. Duh-Dead baby brother? Shaky m-marriage? Remember all that?”

“Oh, fuck off. I just thought—” that Bill’s the strongest out of all of them. That he can drag the devil by its horns and come out of the fight unscathed. “Wait, *shaky marriage*? Are you in *couple’s* therapy?”

“Yes, I am. Among other things.”

“Since when?”

“Since I got back.”

“You’ve been in therapy for *three* months?”

“Richie, I don’t go to my therapist everyday. This isn’t like s-school.”

Richie snorts. “I know it isn’t like school, Bill. Just—geez.”

Bill just looks at him, melancholic and understanding. “Therapy helps man. Wuh-Whatever you’re going through,” Bill looks at him pointedly. He probably already has an idea what that *whatever* is. “It’s gonna help you out. It’s a p-process, but it helps.”

They go home, Bill strapped and sleeping in Richie's passenger seat. He takes Bill to his house, and his wife, Audra, opens the door for them.

They don't have time to consider formalities, not when Bill places a sloppy kiss on Richie's cheek before making his way inside without so much as a parting word, leaving Richie and Audra looking at each other a little funny. It's only their second time seeing each other, and Richie feels a little weird now that he knows about the counseling and the *shaky marriage*.

Sure, Bill is half of the counseling and half of the marriage, and that should be enough. Bill is his friend. His *best* friend. There's nothing weird about his best friend having a wife.

Except, his best friend has had that wife for eleven years, and Richie hasn't been a part of that. Even when being a part of Bill's life should have been as natural as breathing.

I should have been here, he wants to tell her. I should be saying some stupid joke about the counseling and the shaky marriage that would make you want to close the door on me because you're aware that I'm a dense asshole who couldn't shut up and that I use shitty jokes to lighten the mood even if it actually just makes the situation worse and Bill has had too much to drink and you would probably blame me because of who I am as a person even though I had nothing to do with Bill drinking tonight but why the fuck are my thoughts going a mile a minute but my mouth can barely function? Why, Audra? Tell me why.

He should know her. And she should know him. But neither of them do, so he only waves a hand goodbye.

Richie turns and walks away. When he makes it back to his car, his phone pings.

It's a message from Eddie.

'How was the dinner?' it reads.

He stares at his phone. He could feel the sweat dripping from his forehead. He takes his jacket off and lowers the collar on his

turtleneck. When that doesn't work, he lowers the temperature on the AC. It doesn't immediately register to him that he hasn't even started his car yet, too dumbfounded at the text he received.

What's wrong, Trashmouth? Eddie got your tongue?

He wishes.

'great :) wish u were here' he replies, and promptly regrets it when he hits the send button.

Come back to me, Eds—

He groans, reading and re-reading the message he just sent. A minute stretches. Every second feels a lot longer than it actually is. Despite the AC finally blowing cold air into Richie's face, he still manages to sweat profusely.

Finally, after five minutes that felt like an hour, his phone pings again.

He feels a little guilty at the disappointment that settles in his stomach. It's from Bill.

LA therapists, the email reads.

He shakes his head at his phone and steps on the gas pedal. He goes a mile over the speed limit, reaching his apartment complex ten minutes sooner than he usually does.

He sighs when he reaches his parking slot, and checks the time on his phone. It's probably around three AM in New York. Maybe Eddie just fell asleep.

He shakes the thought away. Stupid of him to think anything was going to come out of that text. Eddie was probably just genuinely checking up on him. That never really happened before, though, since it was Richie who usually initiated any sort of conversation between them.

So maybe there's a lot more adjusting than Richie bargained for, but he tries to adjust anyway, because he deserves to say 'fuck you' just

as much as Bev does.

Richie doesn't immediately set up an appointment with the therapist.

(He meets with his manager, Steve Covall, first and they talk less about where Richie has been or what the next step is and more about why Richie is being an ass about this entire ordeal, if *the solution is right there in front of us, and that solution is—*

"I'm not doing a goddamn Netflix show."

"You're fucking stubborn, Tozier."

"Well, I'm not Richard 'Stubborn' Tozier for nothing."

"I thought it was *Trashmouth?*")

But when he does, it's four months and a few sermons from Bev later.

The clinic doors look menacing with its polished, fine wooden grain. He's afraid it would swallow him.

Deep breaths, Tozier. Deep fucking breaths. You can do this. You can—

He grabs his phone and presses dial.

"Hello?"

"I know you hate getting phone calls out of the blue like this—"

"Richie."

"—but I just really need you to understand that I'm calling for a very important reason—"

"Rich."

"—and I really need to talk to you right now because I need to talk to somebody but Eddie hates me and Bill's probably sleeping because he's not picking up and—"

"Richie."

“—Stan I’m about to hurl in my car and I just got it *cleaned* I got my car cleaned, Stan—”

“Richie, beep beep for a second, will you? What do you need?”

“Stan.”

“Richie.”

“Stan.”

“Rich.”

“I’m at work, dude,” he hisses. “What the fuck do you need?”

“I’m about to head to my first therapy session and I think I’m gonna throw up in my car if I don’t make good use of my mouth.”

“Oh, shit.” There’s scuffling on the other side. Stan sounds like he’s running—no, power walking on tiled floors. He utters a small sorry, probably at someone in his office, before clearing his throat. “That’s great, Rich!”

Richie groans. “Bill told you, didn’t he?”

“He told me you were considering. It’s been, what, four months? We thought you weren’t gonna push through.”

“No, yeah. Took me a while. I go in at about fifteen minutes.”

Stan hums. “This is really brave of you, Rich. I’m proud of you.”

“Do *you* ever think about going to therapy?” Richie asks him. “Because of the—um—you know, the whole Pennywise thing.”

Stan is silent for a while, and Richie thinks he’s struck a nerve. “Yeah,” Stan replies. “I’ve been to, a few times already. Before Mike called. But it isn’t about the Pennywise thing.” Stan clears his throat. “There was a time when Patty and I—we were... hmm, how do I say this? We wanted a kid. We were trying to get pregnant, I guess is what I’m saying.”

When Stan pauses, Richie hums to urge him to continue.

"And when we couldn't, I blamed it on me. It sucked, the feeling. Brought me down. And Patty too, I think. And therapy helped me through with it. Really, the first step is recognizing that there's a problem and that it's something you want to fix."

Richie nods even though Stan couldn't see him. "Wow, Stan. And you're okay now?"

"I'm okay now," Stan says sincerely. "So really, Rich, trust me when I say I'm proud of you."

"Me too, Stan. Proud of you, that is."

"Thanks, Rich."

Richie's cheeks feel warm. "Do you remember that I'm gay?"

"Wh—yeah, of course I remember. Why wouldn't I?"

Richie makes a sound, not unlike a cat coughing out a hairball. "I don't know. We just—we forgot about a lot of things. Who's to say no one forgot that I was gay."

"If you meant in that sense, then yeah, I forgot. The same way I forgot you or Bill or Eddie existed." Stan pauses. "I'd like to think I remember most of what I have to by now."

"Me, too." Richie rests his forehead on the steering wheel. He decreases the temperature on the AC. It's so hot all of a sudden. "Just —" He sighs instead when his mouth hung open and no words come out.

"I'm sure e—uh—everyone probably remembers, Rich."

Probably.

Richie agrees.

Everyone *probably* remembers; like the way they remember how neglectful Richie's parents can get or the way they remember how

much Richie listened to rock and roll or the way they remember how much Richie loved to play Street Fighter in the arcade.

They *remember*.

Which means *Eddie* remembers. Which means—

—*come back*—

—*I promise*—

Except Eddie hadn't exactly made it clear what it is he remembers. Because Richie remembers more than a few things that came along with him being gay.

"Maybe some of them forgot?" Richie insists. It isn't just Eddie who hasn't made a single comment about his sexuality. It's everyone else too.

"Then you can tell them all over again. It's gonna be okay, Rich."

"Awesome."

"You don't sound thrilled."

"Because I'm not, Staniel. Thank you for noticing."

He checks the time. Two more minutes before his appointment. He thinks about bailing, but he'll most likely get an earful from Bev, and Bill won't stop hounding him for more dinners to play pseudo-therapist in the meantime.

"Hey, I gotta go," Richie says, sounding defeated even to himself. "Blah blah therapy."

"Okay," Stan says slowly, and a bit too sing-song to sound like Stan. "I love you, Rich. I'll see you soon."

"I love you, too, buddy. Bye."

The session goes *well*—as in, Richie doesn't vomit but he does end up

sobbing and slobbering into his shirt as he tells the therapist that he's gay and he's been in love with his best friend for thirty years who has been married for five years to a woman so much like his mom. That this best friend "*almost died*" because Richie is a moron who couldn't get his act straight (pun intended) and couldn't sort his shit out and couldn't even pretend to be smart with his decisions, when really, pretending is all he's done his entire life.

And the session goes *well*, because his therapist doesn't care that some celebrity just told her his deepest, darkest secret in between screaming and incoherent mumbles, and just nods at him and tells him, "You've done great work identifying the problem," or something along those lines. Oh, and, "You're one step closer to moving on, Mr. Tozier."

And it goes *well*, because when Richie screams, "*Fuck you*, I'm not fucking moving on from Eddie," not like it's something he can't manage to do, but more along the lines of something he outright refuses to do, and she doesn't flinch or talk back or disagree with him. She just nods and implore him to continue blowing snot on the inside of his shirt.

He goes out of the clinic with his jacket zipped up, his sunglasses on, and his face red but clean. He whips out his phone and types a short message, 'just got out of therapy. and im gay,' hits send and drives home. His phone gets a ton of messages after that, but he doesn't check it till he's under the covers in the sweet solace of his bedroom.

A message from Bev: 'We know, rich!'

A message from Bill: 'wat did your therapist turn you gay? i thought you were already gay?'

A message from Mike: 'You know you're not supposed to date your therapist, right?'

A message from Ben: 'richie has a date?!?!?!'

No message from Eddie, though Richie can see that he's read them all.

‘no,’ Richie clarifies, ‘what i meant is i went to therapy and on a completely unrelated note i would like to remind everyone that im gay in case anyone forgot.’

Bill replies, ‘i wasnt even aware you told everyone.’

Bev says, ‘Richie told me when I was already living in portland, but I remember.’

Stan finally butts in, ‘Nobody forgot, Rich. You’re okay.’

Richie smiles, and then Mike replies, ‘Eddie hasn’t replied. Maybe he forgot.’

Eddie responds then, ‘I didn’t.’

A switch flips in Richie’s brain. It’s a sudden thing that gave him no warning.

He might be out of tears, but his lunch is still sloshing around in his stomach.

A mixture of brown goo and white bits of food escape his person and stain the sheets. He covers his lips almost immediately and then jumps off the bed when his abdomen gives another lurch. Richie runs to the bathroom, and hurls whatever is left. His body doesn’t stop until his throat constricts and his eyes water.

He’s hunched over the toilet bowl, hands on the seat to support the weight of his chest and his head, both suddenly so heavy Richie wants to lay himself on the bathroom floor and just close his eyes and go to sleep.

Exhaustion overcomes him, but he feels relieved in a way—

—tell me this isn’t a mistake—

—it’s not—

—hurt, and aching, and oh so very fucking sad. But the release felt nice.

He could use a drink. It's a thought he pushes to the back of his mind.

Richie gets up. He heads back to his room and removes the dirty sheets off his bed. He takes off his clothes—all of it—and throws the heap by the hamper he keeps beside his closet.

He takes a long shower, and then a bath. He submerges himself under the shallow water of the bathtub for a few seconds, and then promptly thinks of Stan. He resurfaces and breathes in deep. He then pulls the plug off the drain, still seated on the cold porcelain of the tub.

He rests his head on the edge of its mouth, the coolness of it alleviating a bit of the throbbing in his temples.

He thinks of Stan, again.

Derry was shit, Tozier. You know Derry was shit. You can't fucking blame Stan for what he did—

Eddie had to experience Derry twice. Derry killed him. You can't blame him either if he—

Richie gets out of the tub and back to his bedroom. He puts on his pajamas, and heads to the guest bedroom, rendering his own room still disgusting with the smell of vomit hanging in the air.

The guest room is rarely (never) used. He removes the dust cover on the bed and doesn't bother to put his pillows in cases. He settles himself under a blanket.

The time reads at half past seven.

He closes his eyes for what felt like a second, and then jerks them open, wide awake.

His phone is ringing from the bedside table. The time reads eleven in the evening.

"Eds?"

“Oh, fffuck—sorry, you were sleeping. I sh-shouldn’t have called.”

“No, Eddie, it’s okay?” Richie rubs his eyes. “What’s wrong? Are you drunk?”

“Yeah, lil’ bit.”

“Where are you?”

“‘Partment. Head’s spinnin’.”

“Right. Are you alone? Where’s Myra?”

It takes a while before Eddie responds. “Sleepin’ in the bedroom. You know we haven’t been sssleepin’ in the same room for, like—uh—two years now?”

“No,” Richie says, “I didn’t know that. I’d assume that would be the case for someone who married his mom.”

Eddie giggles, but lets out a little ‘fuck you’ anyway.

Richie smiles despite himself. “I’ll let you sleep, Eds. You should go to sleep.”

“Rich.” It’s barely a whisper. Richie almost misses it. “Stay.”

Richie holds his breath. In the silence that follows, he tries to muster up the courage to say something. But the words die in his tongue, with his mouth left hanging open and his heart constricting in his chest.

“Will you stay, Rich?” Eddie whispers.

“Yes,” Richie whispers back.

The night stretches. An hour passes and Richie’s body threatens to give up on him. He dozes off a few times to the sound of Eddie muttering comments about the show he’s watching on TV.

“How was your first therapy session, Rich?” He’s slurring a lot less by now.

Richie blinks his eyes a few times to fight off the grogginess. "Therapy was...therapy. It wasn't really my first. I've gone to therapy when I first started the whole..." He waves his hand in the air, "...comedy career."

"Really? You never told us."

"It was a long time ago, Ed. And it didn't last long. It doesn't count anymore."

"Pssh."

"Aren't you tired?"

"Of course I am."

"Then maybe we should—" *be honest with ourselves and settle this once and for all. Are you keeping your promise, Eddie?* "—maybe we should go to sleep."

Eddie sighs. "So soon, Rich?"

Why now?

Why not sooner?

"You need sleep, man. Hangover's gonna be a bitch tomorrow."

"*You're* the bitch."

"Real mature."

"No, wait," Eddie says. "Wait, there's something in my brain."

"In your brain?" Richie feels his heart in his throat. "Are you actually sick? Is that why you haven't been around lately?"

"What are you talking about? I've been around."

Richie takes a deep breath. "Not as much as I want you to be."

Eddie lets out a huff. "No Richie, I'm not sick. I mean there's...there's something I wanna say."

“Eddie, you’re drunk—”

“So? You were drunk the night before I left, asshole.”

“Yes, I remember.” Richie sits up, more awake now. “What’s wrong, Eddie?”

“I’m—I just—I’m trying, Rich. I’m doing my best, okay?”

“Oh-kay? Okay.”

“I want you to know that I’m doing my best.”

Richie sighs. “If this is about you being absent, I didn’t mean that. I guess I—I miss you, Eddie. I really do. I think you miss me, too.”

“I do, Rich.” Eddie’s voice suddenly sounds really raw. “I really do. And I’m doing my best, okay?”

“I don’t understand what that means, though.”

“I’m sorry,” Eddie says, small and terrified. “I’m so sorry.”

“Eddie, I think I’m gonna call Bev and ask her to check up on you. I’m worried here, man.”

“No!” Eddie exclaims. “No,” he says again but quieter.

“You’re worrying me,” Richie replies.

“Sorry.”

“Stop apologizing.”

“Okay.”

Richie settles back down on his bed. “I need you to go to sleep, Eds. I’ll stay on the phone and wait for you to fall asleep, okay?”

“Okay, Rich. Thank you.”

“No problem. Good night, Eds.”

“Good night, Richie.”

2. Chapter 2

Notes for the Chapter:

once again, unbeta'd. if there are any spelling or slight grammar mistakes, please feel free to call them out :^) enjoy!

A week later, the Losers see each other again after seven months of separation.

This isn't a big deal for Richie, seeing as the only thing he actually needs to do for work is to come up with original material for a new standup tour, something he had started—albeit with frustrations, deleting word after word, closing and opening the document, procrastinating with drama videos on YouTube—and Steve had been pretty lenient with deadlines. So shifting his schedule around isn't that strenuous.

What is a big deal is the Losers are all coming to L.A. Where Richie lives. And he's not entirely sure how he's supposed to approach that, or if he's even supposed to make a big deal about it. *Is it even a big deal?*

Too late now. His brain has already processed a million and one ways everything could go wrong, Eddie hating him being number one.

The planning is abrupt and they settle with Anaheim after Stan admitted he hasn't been to Disneyland. Eddie chimed in moments later that he never got to enjoy Disneyland at all, since the last time he's been was with his mother. And Mike...well, Mike hasn't left Derry since seven months ago, and he went straight to Florida when he did.

It's only right that all the Losers get their much needed Disneyland experience.

"We should book a hotel there," Richie suggests, "we can all afford it. And anyway, it's Disneyland."

Bev furrows her brows in thought. Her face looks small in the shared frame she has with Ben.

Ben is smiling at the camera, making faces at Mike who does the same. Mike is on his morning walk somewhere, completely unbothered that people might see him making ugly faces on the phone by himself.

Bill's frame is steady, while he is scurrying about in what looks like his office. There's rustling from the mountains of papers atop his desk. Stan seems to be eyeing this. His chewing comes to a slow, and then to normal speed again in tune with Bill's steps.

Eddie's camera is also steady, but he's nowhere to be found. Richie can hear him writing. It's a light scratching sound the Richie would have completely missed if he wasn't wearing his earphones for the call. Eddie himself is making incomprehensible noises from reading or muttering to himself with whatever he's busy with.

To say that Richie is nervous of this whole ordeal is an understatement. If Eddie remembers anything from his drunken stupor two nights ago, he doesn't mention it. Richie has been breathless since he answered the group call, and even with Eddie out of the frame for most of it, he can't help but hear the hammering in his chest.

Not that he would make any mention of it either. The moment he would open his mouth is the moment he would have to empty the contents of his stomach.

"So we just go straight to Disneyland?" Bev asks. There's a glint in her eyes. She's looking at a part on her screen. Richie has a feeling the look is aimed at him.

"Yup," Richie answers.

Bills seconds this, nodding. "Easier that way," he says absent-mindedly, and Bill always gets the final say.

Richie books a two-bedroom suite at the Disney's Grand Californian Hotel and Spa—two nights—and entrances for all of them to

Disneyland Park.

The night before the Losers arrive, Bill and Richie head out for dinner at a local café by Richie's apartment.

"Ready, Rich?" Bill asks.

"As I'll ever be," Richie replies.

The next day, they're all huddled together at LAX. The last to arrive is Eddie, walking fast and glancing from side to side. He spots them, and raises his hand in a wave.

"Eddie!" Mike exclaims. A few heads turn their way, but that doesn't faze any of them.

They envelope each other in a group embrace.

"How ya doin', Eds?" Richie manages.

"Not my name," Eddie says, and Stan mouths word for word at the same time.

Bill and Ben laugh at this, and Mike repeats the question. "How *are* you, though?"

Eddie waves a hand in front of his face. "Fine, fine. Alive."

"Ain't that right?" Stan wraps an arm around Eddie's shoulders.

They all head to the rental van Bill picked up earlier in the morning. They reckoned going together in one van would be a loud and rowdy mess, but going any other way would have felt wrong anyway.

The trip, overall, goes pretty well.

They've explored most of the attractions at the park, skipping most meals or eating while they walked to make the most out of their time.

Richie and Eddie are mostly back with their usual banter, but there's still that silence that lingers when they think none of the Losers are paying attention.

At first, Richie considered the silence companionable. Which is somewhat true, at least. Either of them would laugh a little too hard at something someone said, and they'd catch the other person staring. They'd look away, both of them, of course, because Eddie is Eddie (from a lack of a better word because Richie really does *not* want to say *married man* because he hates it and he hates that he hates it) and Richie has the habits of a fucking thirteen-year-old.

Still, Richie spends most of his time looking at Eddie. It has been Eddie this and Eddie that.

It's 'Hey, Eddie, whaddaya think of this hat?' coupled with a goofy grin and an impression of an amalgamation of Disney characters. Sometimes it's 'I voiced this character' or 'Did a bit of VA work in this movie' which wowed all of the Losers, but it's Eddie who has the widest eyes of them all, looking at Richie and then *not* looking at Richie, but accusing him of fucking with them all the same.

"Oh, this orange robot is so cute," Bev says. She holds a stuffed toy up. "Ben!"

"I did his voice," Richie says nonchalantly.

"You did *not*," Eddie insists. He holds up a hand to his face, then cuts the air in front of it. "No, you did *not*."

Richie does a sample, an electronic voice that comes from his throat. It sounds a little different without the post-production edit for his voice.

"What the fuck, Richie. You're not even safe for children—"

"Ouch, Spagheds—"

"Oh, fuck off."

"—but I did indeed voice all this character. And all those other voices. I do voices, that's what I do."

"I thought you were a comedian," Mike points out.

"I'm flexible."

“Sure, you are,” Eddie interjects, then leaves the Star Wars shop and the Losers behind.

And that conversation ended with that.

Sometimes, Richie would make the effort to pull everyone towards rides and attractions and mascots that he wants (not really) to see, just to have an excuse to grab and tug at Eddie.

“You know you don’t have to drag the rest of us with your senseless flirting, right?” Stan says to him when they’re alone on a bench, while the rest of them take pictures closeby. “You’re getting obvious, Rich.”

“Who said we were flirting?”

Stan raises an eyebrow at him. “I’ve known you for years. This isn’t new, Richie.”

“I can’t just...” They both look at Eddie, posing by a lamppost on a walkway with Mike taking his picture. “It’s *Eddie*.”

“Exactly, it’s *Eddie*. That’s you and Eddie’s thing.”

“What? Dragging each other around?”

“And breaking boundaries and being all up in each other’s personal space.”

But it hasn’t been like that for years now, *has it, Stan*. Eddie left all those years ago, and a promise has hung between them since then. Not exactly broken, but hanging above their heads all the same. And Richie is left confused and cautious, going between who he was as a kid and who he is now and try to jump high enough to reach for that promise.

Richie shrugs. He’s not about to let this ruin his vacation. “I’ll stop dragging you around.”

Stan only sighs. He stands up and pulls Richie with him. They head to the rest of the Losers for pictures.

On their last night, they opted for a quiet evening at the hotel's restaurant.

They pick a secluded spot where they can laugh and tease and share stories without disturbing other patrons.

"How's the divorced life, Bev?" Mike asks.

Bev raises her glass and rests her head on Ben's shoulder. "Wonderful. Less punchy," she jokes.

They laugh despite the sensitivity of the matter, but Bev doesn't mind and seems to be doing well for herself. Ben holds her closer and places a kiss on the top of her head.

"What about you, Stan? How's Patty?"

Stan smiles. "Good! She's good. I asked her to come with this weekend, but she said she didn't want to bother us. This seemed like a big deal, she said."

Eddie and Stan showed up outside the townhouse the midnight after defeating It. They were cold and naked and covered in sewer grime, but *alive*. They could hardly believe it. Even though the smell was almost unbearable, they all drew each other into the longest hug Richie has ever experienced.

The Losers knew they had to call Patty and fly her in to Derry no matter how much Stan protested at the suggestion. Even Patty insisted she wanted to come. .

When Patty arrived, they were nothing but welcoming. She seemed like the kind of girl just right for Stan, alright; smiling and conversational and quick-witted. They all loved her, and dubbed her honorary Loser that night.

"Aw." Bev frowns. "A shame she didn't get to experience your first trip to Disneyland with you."

"Kids will be kids,' I think is what she said. That I deserve to have good fun with friends without a wife getting in the way."

“She won’t get in the way,” Mike responds, frowning.

“Yeah, she’s not Eddie’s wife or something,” Richie grumbles, but the rest of them take it as a joke. They laugh, with Eddie telling them to go fuck themselves, but doesn’t comment on the matter any further.

“Where’s Audra?”

Bill shrugs. “Busy. Got a lot on her plate right now.”

“When are we gonna meet him, Bill?” Stan asks. “Patty and I have seen a few of her movies. Patty says she wants to meet a *real* celebrity one day, not a comedian who can’t even write his own jokes.”

“Hey.” Richie jabs a finger at him. “I’m working on it, alright? Trashmouth Tozier is gonna make a comeback. Insert ‘your mom’ joke here. Swell, great. Moving on.”

And they do. Mostly because Richie doesn’t want to tell them that he has written practically nothing *yet*. And most of what he will write anyway is in some form of ‘I’m gay as hell’ rather than ‘I’m fucking your mom.’ He knows they’ll be proud. And he’ll be proud. But they’ll tease him about how proud they are and they’ll tease him about being proud of himself.

That can come *later*, when Richie has had a few more sessions in therapy, when he’s more adjusted with his feelings for Eddie, when he’s more confident of his writing and his performance. He has no doubt that that’ll come *later*.

(The first one, at least. The second one, he doubts. The last one will take more time than he cares to admit, but he can always pretend).

Richie wants to experience the *now*. Because the thought of *later* is unknown, but it’s forever looming over them. He doesn’t want to think about later because he’s afraid. So, he doesn’t.

Instead, he focuses on the friends in front of him. The friends who are smiling and laughing and teasing and *alive*. They matter to Richie more than any comeback or show he’ll have in his lifetime.

“A toast, then!” Bev says, raising her glass once more.

Richie raises his glass of iced tea. “To the Lucky Seven.”

“To the Lucky Seven!”

It’s only two o’clock in the afternoon.

Richie reaches home, tired and sleepy. Souvenirs of Mickey Mouse ears and princess crowns fill his bag.

The Losers-shaped void settles in his mind almost immediately. He heads to his bedroom, plops down the bed, and sleeps a dreamless sleep.

He is jolted awake.

The sounds of his phone and his doorbell ringing all at once yanks him out of his slumber.

Richie rubs at his eyes, puts on his glasses, and checks the caller ID.

It’s Bill.

“Shit, dude,” he says, dry and raspy, “what the fuck? Did something happen?”

“Open the door,” Bill says.

“It’s 5 in the afternoon, what do you want?” Richie hangs up and throws himself back on the bed. He covers his eyes with a pillow and counts from one to ten.

He gets up when the sound of the doorbell doesn’t stop.

“Yeah, yeah, you fucking maniac,” he screams as he gets up.

He trudges on begrudgingly to his foyer. He doesn’t bother wearing a shirt. Or pants for that matter. It isn’t like Bill hasn’t seen him in his tighty-whites. A pair of boxers won’t kill him.

He opens the front door and—

“Stan?”

“He-whoa. Put on some pants, Trashmouth.”

“Aren’t you supposed to be on a plane?” He pulls Stan in a hug.

“May I join?” Bill asks. He’s standing behind Stan, smile on his face as he approaches them.

Richie stretches his arms behind Stan to drag Bill into the embrace. “What are you guys doing here?”

Stan doesn’t answer till they all separate. He takes a good look at Richie’s face and says, “Can’t have you moping around like this, Rich.”

“Moping? Who said I was moping?”

“Who *doesn’t* say you’re moping?” Bill teases.

“We brought coffee.” Stan raises the Starbucks cups in his hand. “You aren’t supposed to be drinking alcohol, right?”

“I can. I’m just avoiding it,” Richie says. He shows them in. “You guys don’t have to hop on this train with me, though. I’m a big boy now.”

“Sure,” Stan says. “We’ll see about that.” He gives Richie a kiss on the forehead and a small slap to the cheek. “I’m crashing here, by the way.”

“So am I.”

“What? Why? What’s wrong with your gigantic house?” Richie asks.

“Nothing,” Bill answers, shrugging. “Can’t I crash at your place?”

Richie grimaces, but lets it go. “Of course, you can, Big Bill. It’ll be like when we were thirteen again.”

They prepare linguine with Bolognese sauce despite Richie’s protest

that they order takeout. Stan manages most of what's going on in the kitchen, with Richie and Bill slicing and mixing whatever is necessary. When there's nothing much to do but wait, they settle in various spaces in Richie's apartment. Stan flips through a magazine though he stays close to the stove to avoid burning the sauce. Richie, finally adorned with a Guns n' Roses t-shirt, lounges by the breakfast nook facing the kitchen counters. His back is to the living room where Bill is looking around and going through the random stuff Richie owns.

Richie supposes it's the writer in him that warrants the snooping around, wanting to know every little detail in Richie's living room.

"If you wanna make a Richie Tozier Biography, all you have to do is ask, Bill," Richie comments.

"Ha ha, Rich." He continues flipping through baby photos and DVDs and cassette tapes. "How old are these?"

Richie shrugs.

"Mind if I play something?" Bill asks.

"Go ahead," Richie replies.

He hears the sound of a cassette tape entering its dock. The player whirs to life.

Richie's heart is caught in his throat at the first note of the song.

'Oh, my love, my darling'

He's frozen in his seat, but he could feel Bill and Stan's gaze boring holes into his skull.

The thought of prom crosses his mind, although it's only flashes of the memory. Never the entire scene. There's the dancing and the girls and booze-less punch. There's Eddie looking dapper in his suit, and the rest becomes a blur. Then comes *that* night. The night before Eddie left. This doesn't come in short bursts, but like a video on loop. It's fast and slow at the same time. Richie remembers the minute details in Eddie's almost empty room, on Eddie's freckled face, the

way Eddie wrapped his arms around Richie's neck.

He remembers all that when his throat constricts. His eyes burn, and hot tears fall to his cheek. He doesn't snuffle. It's quiet for a moment. The briefest moment. Just before he hears the stove knob turning and a button on the player being pressed.

Just before Stan and Bill reach him, it's quiet.

And then everything comes crashing down. Richie's face falls to his hands, his forehead falls to the cool surface the marble countertops. He releases a sob so deep, he loses all the air in his body.

He sobs.

He sobs.

He sobs.

A hand or two or three reach out to him. A chest presses against his back. An arm wraps around his shoulders.

Someone whispers something to his ear, but he doesn't quite catch it. It doesn't matter. He can't stop sobbing anyway.

"I—he—" Richie tries and fails.

None of them usher him to stop. They don't let go until his whines die down to soft hitches of breath. He wipes the snot from his nose as he inhales and exhales shakily.

"He—" Richie hates how vulnerable he is, "he promised me. Eddie."

Bill and Stan push themselves off of Richie, and look at him expectantly.

"Before he left," Richie says, voice hoarse but clear. He tries to focus on the words he wants to say, but images of that night overpower his thoughts. He pushes through, sentences broken. "Before he left Derry—he uh—The first time around. When we were thirteen? I told him—that—that I'm gay, and. And."

Bill rubs his arm up and down. "It's okay, take your time."

"He promised me. He promised me he'd come back. To me. I kissed him—I shouldn't have. Now he hates me. He hates me—"

"Oh, Richie," Stan says. "Maybe, Eddie just—"

"Forgot? Yeah. Sure, he did." Richie clears his throat. He uses the back of his shirt to wipe at his eyes some more. "I scared him off, Stan. That's what I did. I came on too strong. It wasn't supposed to be like that, I swear—we weren't supposed to kiss, but we did. And he probably regrets it—"

"Rich," Stan replies firmly. "It's okay. You don't have to explain."

"Sorry," Bill butts in. "I shouldn't have played that. It was labeled 'Eddie' and I got curious."

Richie waves him off. "S'fine. I think I was due for another breakdown anyway."

"What are you gonna—" Stan starts, but Richie stops him by clamping his hand over Stan's mouth. Stan slaps the hand away. "Gross, that's got snot all over it."

"Hush. I'd rather not talk about this anymore."

"Rich—"

"No," Richie demands. "I have that therapist for this. You're both too close with Eddie. I don't want this whole thing to—to change how you see him. Or think of me breaking down in my kitchen when you see him."

"That's bullshit, Rich," Stan says.

"Drop it, Stan." Richie shakes his head then squints at the stove. "I see you haven't burned our dinner. Let's eat."

So, they do.

They eat in relative silence, save for the occasional 'hmm' and 'this

tastes great, Stan.'

Bill eyes Richie's liquor cabinet more than once. The only bottle that remains is an unopened Black Label. They meet each other's gazes. Richie raises an eyebrow at him.

"You can drink it, if you want," Richie urges.

"No, Rich, it's fine," Bill says. He gobbles down a forkful of linguine.

"Bill, it's fine. Stan here will keep me in check."

"What? Why me?"

"Because you're the responsible one."

Turns out, Stan is pretty responsible. And pretty strong.

Bill, as Richie has learned fairly recently, has no sense of sobriety. The line between drunk and sober blurs the moment Bill has his first drink.

Now, Richie doesn't take Bill as a lightweight, but when he wants release, he really doesn't hold back. He practically melts on the sofa after the first shot. He laughs at *all* of Richie's stupid jokes, and pokes fun at Stan for staying so unquestionably *Stan* the last thirty years.

With one-fourth of the bottle left (Stan having had two shots while Richie had none), Stan is lifting Bill off of the toilet bowl after another vomiting spree.

Richie scrunches his nose at the all-too familiar smell. It's been three months since his last drink, just a little something to take care of the jitters before meeting up with his manager, while it's been zero months since he last puked, though he's proud to say it isn't because of the alcohol.

It took a lot of self-control. He gave most of his bottles of liquor to friends and colleagues that he had pissed off with his absence. He kept one just in case. For what, he's not sure.

Maybe it's something about the remembering. He supposed one of the reasons why he was bordering on alcoholism pre-return to Derry was because of how empty he felt. Despite having people who loved him, there was a lot less who actually liked him. He closed himself off for the most part unless there were drinks involved.

Now that all the Losers are back, back into his life and making themselves feel at home, he doesn't feel the same urge. It's still *there*, and it might not go away until later, but it isn't as amplified anymore.

For the one or two occasions Richie thought about opening the bottle himself, Eddie weighed heavy on his mind. But the thought of blaming Eddie for something that isn't his fault would be unfair to Eddie. Richie hated himself for even thinking it. So he locked the liquor cabinet and actually threw away the key. And the only way they are able to open it now is because Stan knows his way around a lock.

Richie realizes letting Stan break into that lock might have been a bad idea. He also realizes that at least his friends can be as dumb as he is. He revels in that fact instead.

"Stan," he says. "I think I'm gonna head to bed."

Stan looks at him and nods. "I understand. Go, I think I know where everything should be."

He can feel his dinner slosh around his stomach as walks to his room. He takes a deep breath and holds it down, remembers the breathing techniques his therapist told him.

He falls asleep, deep and dreamless.

The next morning greets him with a headache.

You drink, you get a headache. You don't drink, you still get a headache. What kind of a bitch are you, Tozier?

It's the crying. You've been crying too much, honey. Bev's voice looms over him. Maybe he should give her a call soon.

He checks the time. It's almost 9AM. The smell of pancakes and eggs waft to his bedroom.

Stan *cannot* be up this early in the goddamn morning with Bill to take care of last night. Bill was limp in all places. He couldn't even move by himself. More than once, Stan had to haul him up and practically drag him from one room to the next. Not to mention, Bill demanded *dancing*. Stan took the fall for that one too, seeing as Richie could barely even smile for the rest of the night.

Richie heads out of his bedroom and prepares for the worst: Bill asleep on the couch, vomit everywhere, a few spilled drinks here and there. Hell, he wouldn't be surprised if his entire living room is upside down.

He closes his eyes before reaching the mouth of the hallway, before the rest of his apartment is in view. "Tell me how bad it is."

"The fuck are you talking about, Trashmouth?"

"Bill?"

The voice is groggy—scratch that, he sounds like he's dying, but it's Bill alright. He's on the couch, surprisingly clean and neatly arranged. He's hugging his knees, nursing a mug of coffee in his hands.

"He insisted on cleaning last night," Stan chimes in. He's in the kitchen preparing their breakfast.

"While drunk?" Richie says, amusement leaking in his voice.

"After sobering up just a teeny bit," Stan replies. "He felt guilty. Didn't you, Bill?"

"Fuck off, Stan."

"Aw, Big Bill." Richie puts a hand over his chest. He walks toward him.

Bill holds up a hand, halting Richie just a few feet away. "Do. Not."

“Grumpy. Don’t worry about it, Bill. You didn’t have to get shitfaced drunk for *that*, though. What happened last night sucked ass. Mostly for me. But I’m fine.”

Bill just scoffed. His face remains distant.

“What’s wrong? Afraid the wife’s not gonna take you fizzled out so well today?”

“Wife’s not home.”

“Oh,” Stan says, “where’s she?”

“Actually wife’s not anywhere.” Bill huffs. He takes a glance at Richie and then Stan. His face scrunches up, but Richie isn’t sure of the kind of emotion he’s trying to convey. His eyes look a little watery. “ I’m getting a divorce.”

“Oh, Bill.” Richie climbs on the couch, careful not to jostle Bill too much. He puts a hand on his back. Bill doesn’t flinch away. “Why didn’t you tell me? I thought you were going to that couple’s therapy thing.”

After setting their breakfast on the table, Stan heads over to them. He occupies the empty space on the couch and holds Bill’s hand.

Bill reciprocates, clutching on to Stan’s fingers. He shakes his head at the therapy comment, and smiles sadly.

“I didn’t wanna bother you, Rich. Or you, Stan. We’re all doing so well. Both of you, especially. I didn’t wanna add more weight.”

“Don’t you ever think that,” Stan starts, “Don’t think that you’re a bother, Bill. We’re here for you. Always.”

“Yeah! Give us all the weight you got, Big Bill. We can take ‘em.”

“I’m fine, guys,” Bill says. Richie doesn’t believe him. “It’s been a while, the divorce proceedings. We’re at the final stages now.”

“Does anyone else know?”

“Um—Bev knows. I needed advice.”

“Good you picked the sensible one in the group,” Richie retorts.

“Also, the only other person who’s gotten a divorce,” Stan comments.

When it’s time for breakfast, they don’t bring up the divorce or the Eddie topic. Instead, they talk about Stan’s bird watching hobby, Richie’s new material and Bill’s new book.

“I’m just saying, Bill,” Stan says. “Maybe stop killing your protagonists.”

Bill chuckles. “I’ll *try*. Sometimes, it’s just the way to go.”

“It really isn’t,” Stan deadpans. “What’s it gonna take for you to stop killing your protagonists?”

“Oh! Name him after Stan.”

“Beep beep, Richie.” Bill looks baffled. He looks at Stan, who doesn’t seem fazed by the suggestion. “Too fucking soon.”

“No, no. I think he’s right.” Stan gives Bill a sad look in his eyes. His lips are pouting as he leans a little closer. “Can you really do that to me, Bill?”

“Patty will kill me.”

“Exactly! Then I’ll have good material for my show,” Richie responds.

“Both of you are brutal, you know that?”

A ringing goes off. Bill’s phone lights up with a call. It’s close enough to Richie that he takes a peek out of innate curiosity that comes with a ringing cellphone.

Eddie.

Richie looks the other way immediately, as if he saw something he isn’t meant to.

And maybe he isn’t, because when Bill answers, he doesn’t alert any

of them who it is. He simply excuses himself, puts the phone to his ear, and mutters a hello. He leaves the table when a staticky voice comes through.

All Richie could hear is garbled nonsense. He tries to follow the sound of Bill's voice, but it's hushed and low. So, he's hiding something. Something that involves Eddie. Somehow, Richie's brain doesn't compute. No scenario comes into his mind. The fact that Eddie and Bill have conversations—secret conversations at that—that didn't involve him makes his heart slow, makes the pounding of it hard in his chest. He feels suspended in time.

Maybe it's the urgency of the Eddie situation. Maybe it's simply because a large chunk of Richie's brain is *Eddie Eddie Eddie*. Hell, maybe it's the fact that Bill has been his constant companion and the godsend force that has been helping him out whenever he needs it. Now, he feels betrayed. Like he gave away his heart, and all Bill and Eddie did was stomp on it.

Which is stupid, and Richie knows it. The one person who is constantly beside Richie the last few months has been Bill. Whenever Richie made some outrageous demand that they see each other, Bill was always so patient and understanding. He'd give into them almost immediately.

Now he realizes that maybe needing the company was mutual. And he's not sure what to make of it.

Stan doesn't seem suspicious, sitting across Bill instead of beside him. He continues eating his breakfast without a problem in the world.

Meanwhile, Richie's hand starts to tremble. He can feel the nausea settle in. He sits still, doesn't touch his food.

Stan looks at him, confused. One eyebrow is raised at Richie, demanding an answer.

Richie shrugs, feigning a slight stomach ache from the coffee.

Bill comes back soon after.

Richie has lost almost all his appetite by now.

“What was that about?” Stan asks.

“Divorce issue,” Bill says.

“Was that Eddie?” Richie asks, saying the words too quickly. He inwardly curses at himself, at how shit his mind to mouth filter is.

Bill doesn’t respond immediately, instead looks at Richie quizzically and then shoves another piece of pancake in his mouth. “Yeah,” he admits. “Had him go over my contract for the divorce. I hope you don’t mind?” The last question he doesn’t ask sincerely, but it isn’t insincere either. More testing the waters now that he knows Richie has been in love with Eddie since they were thirteen. Or has had his suspicions with Richie being in love with Eddie since they were thirteen confirmed. He wouldn’t put it past his friends to be more aware than they let on.

“Oh,” Richie replies. “No, of course, I don’t mind,” Richie says like it’s the most obvious thing in the world. Because Richie minding is unreasonable and selfish and *stupid stupid stupid*.

“No, Bill, I don’t mind,” he tries again. “I guess my mind is just—” He rubs at the side of his head aggressively. “Going a little haywire. I broke down during therapy, then I had to see Eddie and we—we barely acted normal! I mean, yes, we acted very normally, but that’s weird if it’s Eddie and me. We’re supposed to be the annoying duo, and—and we were just—bleugh! Then I broke down last night again, and I’m just—really, really tired. I am crazy exhausted.

“And I don’t mean like. My mind is like, ‘oh, I’m so tired of thinking. What am I to do?’ But like my entire body feels like it’s about to collapse any second, you know? And I guess that kinda goes hand in hand with the mind thing—and you guys aren’t beeping me? Why aren’t you beeping me?”

Stan stares at him for a second. “Is it weird that I don’t wanna leave you alone?”

“Very,” Richie says. “But I’ll manage.”

“I’m one call away, Rich,” Bill offers.

"Me too," Stan says. "Not really. But you can call me any time."

"Thanks, guys. I think this sleepover did us all some good."

"Now," Bill starts, "go schedule another session in therapy." He finishes the last of his pancakes, wiping the maple syrup off his plate with it. "Lord knows we both need it."

The next night, after driving Stan to the airport and Bill to his house, Richie FaceTimes Bev. It takes her a while to answer.

"Rich?" Her eyes are wide. "It's eleven in the evening."

"And you don't seem to be asleep."

"No. I suppose I'm not. What's up?"

He walks from the kitchen island to the living room. He mutes the TV, but lets its illumination dance all over his skin. He realizes how dark his frame might look for Bev, so he turns on the lamp on the side table. "Nothing much. Just wanted some company."

"You're not alone then."

"Hm, why? Where's Ben?"

"Ben's away for a bit. Meeting for a new project in the UK. But, um. I don't mean me, Rich." She moves the camera, changes its angle a little bit. For a few seconds, the only thing Richie could see is the red of her hair as she looks to the side and keeps the camera close to her face. She scoots, or at least, Richie thinks she's scooting with the sound of cloth scraping cloth. Then, her feed moves again. "Say hi."

"Eds?"

"Hey," Eddie holds one hand up and does a little wave. His shoulders look stiff.

"Hey, Eds." Richie shifts in his seat, a little self-conscious now. "Wife not enough for you or something?"

“Literally fuck off,” There’s no venom in Eddie’s voice. He only sounds tired. “I’m not in the mood.”

“Yeah, I can see that. What are you guys doing?”

“Just talking.” Bev changes the angle of the camera a bit so it also shows her face. She moves closer to Eddie. “How’s Bill? He looked like shit in the photos last night.”

“I’m sure he *felt* like shit. The guy was drunk as balls.”

“I thought you weren’t drinking anymore?” Eddie asks, worry lines all over his forehead.

“I’m not. I didn’t,” Richie says, defensive all of a sudden. “I didn’t drink, don’t worry.”

“Oh.” Eddie nods. “Okay.”

There’s a beeping sound. Bev pulls the phone close to her, the camera just an inch away from her face. “It’s Ben. Rich, can I transfer you to the laptop? I need to take this.”

“Oh, it’s okay, Bev, you don’t—”

“Sure, Bev, you’re laptop should be fine,” Eddie interrupts.

Richie pauses in the middle of standing up. His butt hangs in the air as he stares at Eddie on his screen. “Right. Okay. The laptop should be fine. Thanks, Bev.”

Bev ends the call.

After a few minutes of patting his hair down and arranging his collar, his phone rings. He waits for it to ring three times before he answers. “Hey!” he says a little too loudly.

“Hey,” Eddie answers. “Bev’s in the other room. Ben, you know.”

“Yeah, Ben.” Richie wags his hand in front of his face. “We get it, you’re a hot, successful architect dating a hot, successful fashion designer. You don’t need to flaunt it.”

Eddie chuckles. “I don’t think he’s flaunting. I think that’s just his...er...aura.”

“You into stones and astrology now?”

“No,” Eddie scoffs. “I’m just saying. Ben’s just...naturally hot. He told me he owes you a date.”

“Hah! You tell a guy you’re gay one time...”

Eddie laughs along, awkward and rigid. “What was that about?”

“When I told Ben I was gay the first time around,” Richie starts, heart suddenly racing, but he pushes through, adamant *awkward* doesn’t become their new normal. “He told me I might have to wait a while before he can ask me out on a date. Or...I dunno, something like that I think. When you see him tell him I’m hanging on to that.”

Eddie smiles. He looks at something offscreen, then down, then back at Richie. “Okay.”

“Seriously, though, Eddie. How *are* you?”

“I’m fine, Rich,” Eddie says, waving him off. “Just tired, I think. Myra—uhm. She’s...making things a little difficult for me.”

“I would bet she is.” Richie runs a hand through hair then pats it down again. “Eddie, I know I joke about your mom a lot—”

“Too much.”

“—okay, fine. Whatever. Too much. But I was being serious when I said she’s...she’s not good news, Ed. Your wife. Not your mom, since she’s dead—”

“Yeah, I get it.”

“And I’m probably the last person you want to hear this from, but I don’t think it’s just me who thinks that. The rest of the Losers—hell, even Stan’s fucking wife probably—”

“Okay, Richie. I get it.” Eddie leans closer to the laptop. He doesn’t

look at the camera. Or at Richie. He looks down at the keyboard and picks at a button. Richie could hear it *clack-clack-clacking*.

“Trust me. I know.” Eddie clears his throat. He closes his eyes, as if bracing himself for what he’s about to say. “The moment I heard Mike’s voice again all those months ago, I knew I fucked up. And I fucked up *bad*.”

“Eds, you didn’t—”

“I did, though. I really did.”

“Okay,” Richie says. “But this isn’t your fault.”

“Isn’t it?”

“Come on, Eddie. You’re better than that.”

“Am I?”

“Okay, stop it. This isn’t gonna help.”

Eddie releases a long exhale. He stays still, though he’s finally looking at Richie on the laptop screen.

“Eds?” Richie whispers, and he’s afraid.

Now or never now or never now or never now or never do you love me?
No!

“Do you love Myra?”

“Rich, I—”

“Hey!” Bev calls out. She sits on the floor beside Eddie, and shoves her phone to the laptop’s camera. “It’s Ben.”

“Hey, Ben,” Richie says, but his eyes stay on Eddie, who appears startled but smiling at Bev anyway. “How’s wherever you are?”

“Wherever I am is good.”

“So, you were gonna take me out on a date?”

“Oh, did Bev tell you?”

“Nope, Eddie did. My tastes aren’t fancy Benjamin, but I demand that the meal is at least 100 dollars. And I expect you to drive me to and from.”

Ben chuckle. “I’ll make a mental note of that.”

“Hey, Bev,” Eddie whispers. He’s blurry now, and so is Bev. They have a conversation in the background, and Richie hears the words *turn*, *tired*, *lots to do*, and *morning* among the incomprehensible mutters.

“—that sound, Rich? Rich? Hey, Rich!”

“Uh.” He snaps back, focuses on Ben as he sees in his peripheral that Eddie is standing up to leave. “Sure, Ben. Whatever works.”

Ben huffs a laugh. “Okay, then.”

“Hey, guys, I think I’m gonna sleep now. Where’s Eddie?”

Bev appears clearer on-screen. “Um, he’s says he’s tired. Didn’t he say good night?”

“Nope.” Richie doesn’t mention that she and Ben technically took that time away from them because Richie is trying not to be an asshole. “I guess it’s my turn to turn in.”

“Okay, Rich,” Bev says. “Good night, I love you!”

“Love ya, Rich!”

“Yeah. Love you, guys. Good night.”

He lays himself properly on the couch, too tired and too focused on Eddie’s words to be bothered to transfer to his room.

—*tell me this isn’t a mistake*—

—*it isn’t*—

“He knows. He *knows*?” he tells himself, “what the fuck does that

even mean?”

His mind wanders to when they were kids, the Barrens, the quarry, the clubhouse. It takes him a while to fall asleep, but when he does, he dreams of Eddie’s laughter echoing in the distance.

3. Chapter 3

Notes for the Chapter:

here it is finally! i hope you enjoy the story as much as i enjoyed writing it!

The next four months feels like a routine.

He runs daily, which is what surprises him most. He even wakes up early for it. Running, when done in the proper setting and for the correct reasons, not when a child-eating clown is chasing you down the sewers or an open field, has been very helpful to his mindset. Not to mention, it helps him see the day to day sceneries Los Angeles has to offer; something he hasn't been able to actually grasp and appreciate until recently.

It keeps the mind going too. He hates that it sometimes turns into a distraction rather than an activity he actively wants to participate in. But he takes what he can get.

He goes to see his therapist every two weeks. It got easier to walk in the clinic as time went on. There's considerably less breaking down and screaming and more actual speaking and talking and listening to his therapist. Despite the agitation that sometimes builds up when they have a conversation about the more sensitive topics (read: Eddie), Richie is able to hold down whatever he's eaten for the day and actually focuses on her.

On more than one occasion, he had to call Stan to calm himself down, or to ask Bill to drive him to the clinic himself and wait for him in the car.

"Do *not* leave," Richie would demand.

"I'm not going anywhere," Bill would reply, a little exasperated.

"Not even to get coffee."

Bill holds both his hands up. "I promise I will not leave you. I will stay in the car and the car will stay in the parking lot until you get

back.”

“Good.”

“You’re doing great, Rich.”

“Thanks.”

It’s been a lot of that, too, recently. It’s a lot of ‘you’re doing awesome, Rich’ or ‘I’m proud of you, Rich’ or ‘keep doing what you’re doing, Richie!’ Mostly from Bill, and the occasional text from Stan when he’s about to go to therapy the next day or the day after that. He has kept most of his sessions quiet from the rest of the Losers. Not necessarily a secret, but he doesn’t want all of them to smother him with words of encouragement lest that gives him a complex.

They have been extremely helpful with bringing up stories from childhood for his new material, though. There’s been more than one instance where they all stay up till morning, faces shoved into their phone and laptop cameras. They laugh from the genuine hilarity and, more often than not, the absurdity of what they have lived through. They cry from the lives they never got to live, cry because they are given a second chance to find each other again. To find themselves again.

So Richie is more than halfway through his new stuff. He sends the initial draft to Steve. He has tried to get a hold of Richie via phone call one too many times, before finally getting the idea that no, Richie really cannot get into another meaningless phone call about his material.

‘I’m not open to vocal criticism right now,’ Richie responds to a text telling him to *pick up your goddamn phone, Richard*.

The time it takes for Steve to respond feels a long exasperated sigh. All Richie receives is a thumbs up.

When he opens his email, he finds out that Steve does, in fact, like what he’s got so far. ‘Except the clown thing,’ the mail reads, ‘that I don’t get so much.’

He still has yet to pepper in the fact that he's a homosexual man who's been in the closet for most of his life. So far deep in the closet, he didn't have a clear grasp of his sexuality *until the return of the clown thing*, Steve.

Thee 'clown thing' is staying though. Maybe not as murderous as It actually was, but it's staying *goddammit*.

Next thing Richie knows, it's a month away from the anniversary of It's death, and he's in bed talking with his laptop in hand, talking about another get together to celebrate.

"It's not just killing Pennywise, too," Bev says, "Eddie and Stan coming back to life. I think that's something we ought to actually celebrate."

"Oh, we don't have to do that," Stan reasons.

"Eddie might want to," Bill says. "Bev, maybe you can give him a call and ask if that's something he wants to do?"

"I'm sure he'll be fine seeing all of us together, anyway," Bev answers.

"I guess it's not just the *being alive* thing," Stan says. "It's more about getting another chance to see you guys again."

Mike smiles. "That's sweet, Stan. Too bad Eddie isn't here to give his own verdict," he jokes.

Eddie has been eerily quiet from the group chat. Not that he wasn't quiet before, but now it's like he isn't even there. If not for Bev's updates about Eddie's life, Richie would have thought he left the thing entirely.

"He's just busy," Bev said once during a private call between herself and Richie. "He's helping Bill with the thing."

Richie misses him, of course. Too fucking much if he's going to be honest. He would assume that Eddie would be a lot less cryptic by now. When Bill's divorce had been divulged to the rest of the group, Richie thought that would have been a step closer to Eddie opening

up again. But really, it only got worse from there. Now, Eddie very rarely appears in group conversations. Usually, it's with Bev he appears with, and only during rare occasions he's with Ben.

It's something that's been gnawing on Richie. Something that would have driven him crazy.

Except, as absent as Eddie is in video and vocal conversations, he's been a little more active in Richie's texts, although, Richie *has* been the one initiating and blowing up Eddie's with *dude, what the fuck, are you okay, where are you*. Eddie has been more responsive than Richie expected, and that he's been *doing quite well actually*.

Then where the fuck are you, Eddie?

"So we're good at Bill's then?" Bev says.

"Sure," Bill replies.

"L.A.? Again? You sure Eddie's fine with that?" Richie asks.

Ben grabs the phone from Bev's hand and he aims that camera at his face. He smiles a knowing smile at Richie. Or at least Richie assumes it's at the frame where he is on their device. "We'll kidnap him if he isn't, Rich. But I'm sure Eddie will be fine with it."

Richie makes a face at Ben, sticking his tongue out as if deep in thought. "Fine." He shifts around in bed, sets his laptop aside and hops off it. "Gotta go, guys. I need to get groceries."

"Lemme come with," Bill says. "Need to grab some stuff, too."

Richie shrugs at the camera. "Sure, be ready in 20. I'm picking you up."

He and Bill do their groceries. Grab coffee. Grab dinner. Bill ends up staying at his apartment for the night, what with falling asleep on the couch after watching Brooklyn 99 reruns.

Routines: they keep things simple. They keep things moving forward one day at a time. He knows he needs this before doing more shows. Before throwing himself back to the spotlight with the premieres and

the critics and the reviews. He needs time to find himself again, which he thinks he's at least progressing with, albeit slowly.

It also gets *boring*, so he's thankful they're doing another get-together just to break the monotony in his life.

The day before, Richie prepares. He doesn't do much in terms of packing. He heads out and gets a haircut. He buys a new shirt he can wear for dinner: a long-sleeved button-up shirt with yellow and orange and blue and large fish patterns for good measure.

On the actual day, he doesn't get out of bed until nine in the morning. It's way too late to run, way too late to make breakfast. He walks around his neighborhood to compensate. For what, he isn't sure.

It isn't until noon that he goes back to his apartment, sweaty and thirsty, that he realizes he only has a few minutes before having to pick Bev and Ben up from the airport.

He speeds through taking a shower. Wears an old shirt, then remembers he bought a new shirt, then takes off that old shirt and replaced it with the new one. It's a little wrinkly from just lying on his desk chair the entire night. A little wrinkle never killed anybody. *Or did it? Somebody might have tripped? Crap, I'm late.*

He runs down to his front door, remembers his keys, runs back inside before he does something stupid like lock himself out, runs back out again, and locks the door. Then he remembers his bag, the one with all the clothes in them. He unlocks the door, runs back inside, then runs back out.

Keys.

Bag.

Lock the door.

Good.

He drives his car like he's never before and gets to the airport in record time.

Bev and Ben are already waiting outside, bags in hand, and Bev on her cellphone. He rolls down the window and calls out to them. He gives a sly smile at Bev, whose expression changes the moment she sees Richie.

"Where have you been?" Bev asks. "I've been calling you for thirty minutes!"

"Ah." He forgot his phone. "Well, never mind that. Let's go see Bill."

Bev rides shotgun while Ben gets in the back seat after placing the bags in the trunk.

"Where's Eddie?" he asks as he drives away.

"I think he went on a different flight." Ben shifts in his seat.

"You *think*?"

"I mean, he went on a different flight," Ben says, giving emphasis to every word. "Later is what I think."

"Odd he's not with you," Richie mumbles.

"What do you mean?" Ben asks him.

"Eddie's always around you guys. During group calls? He's never by himself on his own phone. It's just weird."

"I think he's just busy, Rich," Bev tries.

"You and I both know that's bullshit, Bev," Richie replies.

"Maybe."

They spend the rest of the drive in silence.

When they get to Bill's house, Richie stops Ben from ringing the doorbell.

"You have keys to Bill's mansion?" Ben asks as Richie flips through his keychain.

“First of all, *mansion* is a bit too generous, Haystack. This can be labeled as a *big house* at best. It’s got the appropriate amount of guest bedrooms and bathrooms and living rooms. You know the appropriate amount of living rooms? One. Maybe two, if you’re a little freaky. Second, Bill is a sad divorced horror writer, and I am a sad lonely comedian. We are friends living in the same city and we live *separately* for some reason. Yes, we gave each other keys to our houses.”

“Oh...kay?”

“Anyway.” Richie turns the key. He opens the door slowly. “Welcome to the Denbrough-partly Tozier residence. Make yourselves at home. I know I would.”

They head inside.

“Honey, we’ve got company!” Richie calls out.

“I’m in the kitchen!” Bill yells from somewhere at the back of the house. “Show them the rooms, will ya, Rich?”

“Sure, Bill.” He locks the door behind him. “The guest bedrooms are upstairs,” he says, addressing Bev and Ben. “I don’t think anyone’s here yet. But the general rule is if it’s unlocked, it’s unclaimed.”

They head upstairs, Richie and Ben lugging around the suitcases while Bev cocks her head at the doors in thought. She chooses one of the last two rooms near the end of the hallway.

“Good choice,” Richie comments. “It’s the corner room. Good lighting and everything.”

“Since when did you care about good lighting?” Bev giggles, and Ben laughs along.

Richie snickers and shrugs. He has slept in every room of Bill’s house just to get a general consensus on which room felt like what. And while Bev and Ben’s chosen room do have good lighting, it’s too much light for Richie to handle.

He himself chooses the door beside the master bedroom. It’s his usual

go-to bedroom whenever he slept over (that is, if he and Bill don't share the same bed, which they usually do). He goes to open the door, muscle memory urging him to walk in with the turn of the handle, but the door doesn't budge and Richie's face slams hard on the surface of the wood. He tries again, using all the strength his left arm could muster to push and pull the door handle up and down. He huffs in defeat, staring at the door with the look of betrayal.

Just as he's about to find a different guest bedroom, the door swings open slowly. He turns around, half-expecting to see Pennywise taunting him with that stupid fucking door.

What he doesn't expect are Eddie's large brown eyes, angry but bright.

"I was taking a nap," Eddie says.

"The fuck?" he says, stunned. "I thought you aren't coming in till later."

"That what they told you?" Eddie asks, lips pursed and brows furrowed in disbelief. The corner of his lips twitch to a smile.

"Yeah? What else would they tell me?"

"Nothing." Eddie shakes his head. He steps outside of the room and closes the door behind him. He rests his back on the door and folds his arms. "Did you need something?"

"What?"

"Did you need something? Or were you just trying to break into my room without any discretion?"

"No, I just thought Bill the Betrayer wouldn't give up *my* room is all."

"*Your* room? I don't see your name written anywhere."

"Oh, ha ha. Laugh it off, Eds. Now, scoot. I'm sleeping in this room whether you want me to or—"

Eddie moves to the right to block the door handle. "I don't think

that's a good idea, Rich." He looks up at Richie with wide eyes.

Richie's heart nearly explodes. "Is fuckin' Myra in there—"

"No! Jesus Christ, Richie. No, Myra isn't here."

"Then let me in!"

"You don't need to fucking scream—"

"I'm not screaming, *you're* screaming—"

"God, why can't you act like a normal person for once in your life—"

"Why won't you let me in—"

"You're being childish—"

"Oh, I'm childish—"

"Shut up, Richie. Shut up."

"How about you both fucking shut up," a voice by the stairs says.

"Stan the Man!"

Stan is at the end of the hallway, by the stairs. His wife, Patty, stands closely behind him, stifling a laugh behind her fingers. They edge closer to Richie and Eddie, pulling their luggage along, with Stan's arm wide open for a hug.

Richie runs to him and crashes their bodies together.

Stan stumbles back a bit, but hugs Richie tight.

Eddie appears beside Richie then, waiting for his turn. But Stan grabs with him with the arm he used to drag his bag around, enveloping both Richie and Eddie in a warm embrace.

"Hey, Patty!" Richie says as he rests his cheek on Stan's shoulder. "How's my favorite honorary Loser?"

"I'm the only honorary Loser," she points out. God, this is why Richie

loves her. “But, I’m good, Richie. Thank you for asking.” She pats his other cheek.

“Sorry about the ruckus.” Eddie shifts his head to face her properly. “Richie was just being asshole.”

“Oh ho, so *I’m* the asshole—”

“I meant it when I said shut up,” Stan deadpans as he pulls himself away.

Patty gives them a hug one by one. First Richie, and then Eddie.

“Hey, why does he get a longer hug?” Richie asks.

“Because *he’s* my favorite Loser.”

“Wait, what?” Stan gasps. He tugs at Eddie’s collar, but it lacks the strength to actually move him. “Baby, no.”

“Too late, Stan.” Eddie melts into the hug even more.

“Let him have this. He’s just jealous because you married someone decent and someone clearly *not* your mom,” Richie snickers at Stan.

“Beep, fuckin’ beep, Trashmouth,” Eddie exclaims, whipping his head around to face Richie. “Go fuck yourself.”

They let Stan and Patty go pick out a guest bedroom. They choose the one further in the back, away from Eddie’s room.

Richie and Eddie stand in the hallway, looking at each other and then at their shoes, lost at what else to do.

“I think I’m just gonna...” Eddie points to the door of the guest bedroom he has occupied.

Richie, exhaustion suddenly overwhelming him despite having slept longer than usual and having had nothing to do for the entire day but drive and *stand around hallways*, only nods and goes to occupy a free guest bedroom, leaving Eddie not a lot of time to reply.

Picking the room in front of Eddie's, he feigns nonchalance until the door closes behind him. He promptly leans back on it at the sound of the click, gradually sliding down and onto the floor, feeling like the drama queen that he is. He throws his bag on the bed, which bounces back and lands on the floor.

He groans, stands up but leaves the bag where it lies on the floor. He flops on the bed, closes his eyes.

When he opens them next, his rooms is flooded with an orange hue.

"Ah, fuck." He looks down, neck cracking at the motion, and finds that his shirt is even wrinklier than before. He groans, but lets it be. He heads outside to find Bill and the rest lounging in the living room.

Bill, Stan and Patty seem to be engaged in a deep conversation as they paid no mind to Richie. Ben is asleep on Bev's lap, and Bev is having a laugh with Eddie while looking through something on Bev's phone. They side eye Richie, and Eddie whispers something in Bev's ear.

Richie flips them the bird, which sends Bev in hysterics, waking up a sleepy Ben.

Mike is there, too, listening to something Stan is saying. Although, unlike any of them, he perks up at the sight of Richie. "Nice of you to finally join us, man."

Richie sits beside him, and gives him a side hug. "Sorry," Richie mumbles. "Fell asleep. How much did I miss?"

"Nothing much. We're all just catching up."

Richie does indeed have a lot to catch up with. For starters, Bill has finally decided to go take a break from his *big house* and travel with Mike. This has been weighing in Bill's mind since he finalized his divorce, especially after spending day after day alone in such a large space. And, although Richie teases that he's hurt because Bill is leaving him for another man, he's genuinely happy for him.

They've talked about this a lot, Bill travelling. And he's been very adamant about travelling with someone, rather than by himself.

“Who knows,” Bill says, “going around places might do well for my endings.”

“Might do well for my material, too,” Richie adds.

They talk about Richie new stand-up. He talks about the initial draft, which Steve has mostly approved of. Richie has yet to finish everything, but the progress is good and it's there.

“*Don't* get rid of the clown thing,” Ben says.

“That's what I said!” Richie replies.

Then the conversation shifts to a blushing Ben, hand tight around Bev's. They nudge each other with their shoulders, passing ‘you tell them,’ ‘no you tell them’ around like it isn't already obvious with the marks on Bev's ring finger.

“We're getting married!” Bev says, voice sounding like a screech with all her excitement.

Ben gives her a long kiss on the cheek, and they are met with lots of hugs and congratulations.

“What about you, Eddie?” Stan asks. “What have you been up to?”

Eddie just shakes his head and deflects the question back at Stan.

“Um, actually,” Stan scratches the back of his neck, he looks down with a smile on his face, and then looks at Pat.

Patty only looks at them, grin plastered across her face. “We're looking to adopt,” she says, a voice almost a whisper, but her happiness is evident in the way her eyes shine under the dim light. “It's been quite the process, but I think things are looking good for us.”

The entire room goes quiet. It's Bill who pulls Stan first, urging him stand up and wrap him in an embrace. He motions for Patty to join them. Then, one by one, the Losers all go to their spot, limbs tangling together.

This is how they are supposed to be. Loving and supporting each other like it's the only job in the world.

Richie can feel the tips of his ears warm up. A wetness settles in his eyes. He blinks away the tears, and when it doesn't work, wipes it away with the back of Mike's shirt.

"Gross, man," Mike says, voice a little raspy, but he doesn't move away.

They stay enveloped like that for a few more minutes before hearing a light rumbling echo in the room.

"Oops," Richie mumbles.

They move their lovefest to the dining area, where all of Bill's cooking stand neatly arranged and ready to eat.

"Who knew being single would actually teach me how to cook?" he comments heartily. "Well, dig in."

As the night deepens and the sound of the music goes to a slow melody, Richie finds himself lying on the living room couch. His head rests on Stan's lap as he fights off sleep, opting instead to watch Ben and Bev sway to the rhythm of a familiar song.

'I will feel a glow just thinking of you...and the way you look tonight'

Thank god Bill put him in charge of the music, right?

Stan himself is singing along, low and soft. Richie has seen him doze off a few times, and even suggested that Stan go to sleep. He shakes his head and flicks Richie with his index finger on the forehead. Richie wouldn't put it past him to want to revel in the company of his friends a little while longer.

Despite Bill having stocked the fridge with beer, nobody grabs a bottle to drink, all of them too engrossed in the dancing and the conversations and the family games. And despite not having anything to drink, it's still Bill who's the first to pass out on the floor, clutching a throw pillow to his chest. He hasn't stirred since Richie last looked at him,

Patty is curled up on the loveseat, talking in hushed whispers with Mike. Richie could only assume that they're talking about mostly mundane things, that is until he sees them both chancing glances at him after a pause in the conversation. Though, he doesn't fret. They do glance at everyone, just more at him than the rest. Or maybe it's just the peeks at him that he notices. He lay no worry on that thought, and even sends a smile their way whenever he catches them sneaking a look.

Eddie is seated on the other end of the couch where Richie lies, just by Richie's feet. Like Stan, he has dozed off a few times, bouncing the couch whenever he startles awake with a nod. When Richie tells him to go to sleep, all Eddie replies is "not yet" without sparing him a glance.

Richie check the time. It's almost one in the morning.

He nudges at Eddie's thigh with his big toe. "Hey, Eds," Richie mouths.

"Hm?" Eddie says, turning to look at Richie with droopy eyelids.

Cute.

"Wanna dance?"

Eddie jumps in his seat, surprised at the words left Richie's mouth. "Um," he says, loud enough that it echoes in the open space of Bill's living room, prompting Bev and Ben to stop dancing and look at him, wondering what's wrong. Even Patty and Mike's whispers comes to an abrupt halt.

"What's wrong, Eddie?" Stan asks.

"Nothing." Eddie stands and picks at the non-existent lint on his shirt. He wipes his hands down the side of his pants. He clears his throat. "Rich."

Richie sits up, alarmed at the break in Eddie's voice. At how his name seems to have clung in Eddie's throat, forcibly yanked out of his mouth. "What is it, Eds?"

“I need to show you something...”

“Is it your dick because—”

Eddie groans and grabs Richie by the wrist, pulling him up from the couch and nearly falling face first into Bill’s crotch in the process. “Shut up.”

Richie shuts up, following Eddie upstairs. The hand on his wrist is shaking. He looks back to see how the others are taking this. Most of them are overcome by surprise and confusion. Only Bev smiles at him and Ben doesn’t meet his eyes.

“Eddie, what’s this about?”

They head to Eddie’s room. Eddie pulls out a key from his pocket and unlocks the door. Before he opens it, he says, “don’t freak out.”

“Eds, I’m not the one freaking out.” Externally, at least. Inside his heart is hammering. He feels short of breath.

“Sure,” Eddie says, voice suddenly higher in pitch. He goes inside without turning on the lights, still dragging Richie along.

Richie surveys the room of anything out of the ordinary. Moonlight shines through the window. Nothing looks off, except for the rumpled sheets on the bed. On it is a lone manila envelope.

Eddie plops down on said bed and Richie follows suit. He turns on the lamp on the lamp on the bedside table. Between them lies the envelope, mildly threatening with its simplicity. It’s thicker than Richie initially thought. Eddie grabs it then hands it to Richie, who accepts it with a shaky exhale.

“Eds, what’s going on?”

“You promised me you won’t freak out.”

“I’m not going to.” *Lie.* “And I didn’t promise you anything.” Richie’s eyes widen at the implication.

Eddie looks away. He wraps arms around himself, takes in a deep

breath. “I know.”

“Eds, I didn’t mean—”

Eddie looks at him, and Richie shuts up when their eyes meet. “It’s okay, Rich. Go on, open it.”

He lifts the flap slowly, never taking his eyes off Eddie. When he does, it’s to lift the first document he sees.

“A-are these...?” Richie lifts the bundle of papers stapled together. Tears well in his eyes, though he’s not sure why. The document stares right back at him.

“I’m sorry they took so long,” Eddie says, voice cracking at the last word. “I wanted—” He swallows.

Richie casts a look at him.

A single tear falls down Eddie’s cheek. “I wanted to get my life together. I wanted—for...for you. But for me too.” Eddie shudders before the rest of the tears fall.

Richie doesn’t move—*can’t* move. He is spellbound with the way Eddie looks at him, vulnerable and desperate and *free*.

Eddie is *free*.

“I’m sorry I had to hide it from you. I had to tell Bev to ask her about lawyers and—and stuff.” Eddie snuffles. “Then Ben found out after a while. Then when Bill told me he was also getting a divorce, I—I knew I had to help him out, too. I asked him to keep it from you because I...” Eddie sighs, looks at Richie before he continues. “I don’t wanna get you tangled up in my mess.”

“Eds,” Richie starts, forcing himself not to weep but failing. He tries to keep his voice steady, coughing and clearing it in between tiny sobs. When he realizes there’s no going around it, he hovers a hand over Eddie’s own, asking for permission to hold it.

Eddie takes it, lacing their fingers together as if it were there easiest thing to do in the world. As if they haven’t been dancing around each

other for a year now.

“Eds,” Richie tries again. “You know I’ll get all my limbs in a twist for you.”

Eddie chuckles despite himself, cheeks wet and nose clogged. “I know. That’s why I wanted to do this myself. If I told you—god, Rich. If I told you, I wouldn’t be able to live with myself putting you through my bullshit all over again.”

“*Your* bullshit is *my* bullshit.” Richie hears himself as a thirteen-year-old boy.

“Rich.” Eddie tightens his grip on Richie’s hands. “It’s not just that too. I know if I told you, I have a feeling you wouldn’t be able to help yourself with getting involved. But I needed to do this for myself. I deserve that. I deserve to *fight* for *me*. I deserve—”

“You deserve everything, Eddie. *Everything*.”

Eddie releases a deep sigh. “Thank you.”

“What’s all these other stuff for?” Richie looks through them. A letter of resignation, a job contract, medical records. A lease.

“Oh, that’s just...” Eddie scratches at the scar on his cheek. “I’m moving.”

“Oh-kay?”

“Here, Richie.”

“Oh.”

“Here in L.A.”

“Oh.”

“To be close to you.”

“*Oh*.”

Eddie pulls his hand away. He wraps his arms around his torso again,

suddenly defensive. He doesn't meet Richie's gaze. He focuses on his shoes instead, shifting and shuffling on the tiled floor. "That is...if you still want me."

"Eds..."

Eddie closes his eyes. He heaves, breath after breath trying to say the words that die in his tongue.

Richie puts the envelope down and scoots closer. He puts an arm around Eddie, and Eddie melts into the touch and then hides face on the crook of Richie's neck. Eddie releases a sob, two, three. He sucks in air like he's running out, then exhales a whine, hoarse and broken. He leans on to Richie. Eddie is heavy in his arms. Richie sits straighter, supports Eddie's weight and puts his free arm around him. He rubs his hand on his back.

He places a light kiss on Eddie's temple. On his forehead. On his brow.

"Hey," he whispers. "C'mon, now." He moves his hand on Eddie's cheek, the one with the scar, and caresses it with his thumb.

"I'm sorry," Eddie manages to say. He angles his head, lips brushing with Richie's palm, and places a small peck there.

Richie shivers at the contact. "There's nothing to apologize for."

"I hurt you, Rich."

"No, you didn't."

"Yes, I did."

"Not on purpose."

"I lied to you."

"You didn't lie to me. You just...didn't tell me the truth."

"That's what lying is, dipshit."

Richie barks out a laugh. “Ouch, now that’s hurting me.”

Eddie chuckles along. “So?”

“So what?”

Eddie shoves him lightly on the arm. “Don’t make me repeat myself.”

“What?”

“Do you, like!” Eddie does the chopping motion with his hand. His face is skewed with the wrinkle of his nose and the pout of his lips. “Do you... ugh...I can’t believe I’m saying this again. Do you want me back or—um.”

“Eddie,” Richie deadpans. He inhales then exhales deeply. “I am literally one second away from kissing you right now. I am five seconds away from a panic attack, but kissing you is still definitely four seconds closer.”

“You’re an idiot,” Eddie says before looping his arms around Richie’s neck and crashing their lips together.

Richie thought the kiss would be hungrier. He thought it would contain all the kisses they would have had in the years they have forgotten each other, in the years they were separated, in the years they could have spent happy and in love.

And maybe, in a way it, it still does. It’s in the small things.

Look at Eddie. Case in point.

The kiss is chaste and soft. Richie couldn’t stop smiling into Eddie’s lips, couldn’t stop himself from huffing out a giggle. This is Richie Trashmouth Tozier, a literal thirteen-year-old boy, in full force. It doesn’t take him long to laugh, hearty and loud, into Eddie’s mouth.

Eddie pulls away, more surprised than disgusted if his face is any indication. “What’s wrong? Does my breath smell? Are you laughing at my—”

“No!” Richie sputters in between snickers. “I just feel like I’m thirteen

again.”

“Me too.” Eddie smiles at him, hands still cradling Richie’s neck.

“One thing, though.” Richie grabs the envelope and pulls out the lease. “This one? Wherever you’re living, sell it. Or abandon it. Whoever put it in your mind that you won’t be living with me when you move here is a liar and they should be ashamed of themselves.”

“Pfft.” Eddie closes the gaps between.

When they fall onto the bed, Richie on top of Eddie, their bodies come in full contact. Richie could feel Eddie’s boner through his pants, and he rubs it with his own.

Eddie releases a moan, and then gasps. He pushes Richie away, and covers his mouth.

“Oh shit.” Richie scrambles off. “Eds, I’m so sorry—I didn’t mean—”

“No.” Eddie sits up. He places both hands on Richie’s cheeks and pulls him closer. He looks at Richie intently, and Richie looks back at him just as seriously. “It’s fine. Richie, I want this. God do I want this. But I’m not about to get off on us dry humping.”

Richie nods. “Okay, so. Let’s take your shirt off—”

“No!” Eddie grabs at Richie’s hands, the ones tugging at the hem of his shirt. He’s laughing though, which puts Richie at ease. “Maybe not tonight, Rich.”

“What? Why not?”

“I’m really sleepy.”

“God,” Richie laughs along. “We really are a bunch of forty-year-olds.”

“We can feel thirteen all we want, but we’ll never be thirteen again.” When these words escape Eddie’s lips, they look at each other.

Richie smiles sadly at Eddie, and pulls him into a strong hug. “Stupid

fucking clown, huh?”

Eddie snuffles. “Stupid fucking clown.”

“Oh, I have an idea!” Richie stands and pulls Eddie with him. He takes him by the hand and intertwines their fingers together.

“Riche, what are you—”

“You’ll see.”

Richie drags him out of the room, downstairs, and back to the living room where everyone is still present. “Hey, lovebirds,” Richie cries at Ben and Bev. “Move.”

He takes Bill’s phone from the coffee table, and scrolls through Spotify. He lightly nudges Bill’s stomach as he does this. “Big Bill, wake up.”

Bill groans and shifts in his spot on the floor. He gets up momentarily, just as Richie finds what he’s looking for.

“What’s going—” Bill starts, but he’s shushed by Richie.

‘Oh, my love, my darling’

“Richie, are you serious?” Eddie groans.

“Oh, yes. Very.”

‘I’ve hungered for your touch’

Eddie rests his hands on Richie’s shoulders, but Richie picks them up and leads them around his neck. They sway to the music, Richie singing along to the song.

“And time goes by,” he sings, and looks around him. “So slowly.”

Smiles paint the Losers’ faces as they look at him and Eddie in awe. Bev and Bill gives them both a thumbs up. Stan rolls his eyes when Richie grins at him.

He looks back to that night, the night when he came out to Eddie.

How he never expected Eddie to initiate a kiss, initiate anything that resembles a relationship in anyway.

‘And time can do so much’

It was so long ago yet it feels like it was only last night that he and Eddie danced to the same song, feeling overwhelmed and joyous and desperate and miserable. A bunch of seventeen-year-olds trying to find their place in each other’s lives while forced to find their place in the world instead. It was so trivial, Richie now realizes, how scared he felt of telling Eddie that night, when he should have been more scared of Eddie leaving, now that he knows what it entailed.

‘Are you still mine?’

But that’s the past. In the now, Eddie is wrapped around him, swaying to the rhythm of Richie’s once most hated song now turned his favorite. Eddie is touching him, and he’s breathing, and he’s alive. He’s *alive* and he’s *here*.

He’s surrounded by friends that love him; not the kind that shackled Eddie in his own home, where he’s held prisoner in his own body. No, it’s the kind that helped him, the kind that reminds him he’s more than enough, that he deserves more than what he thinks he does, and that he’s braver. Far braver than Richie can think himself to be, even though Eddie would say so otherwise.

‘I need your love’

Eddie whispers along with the song. A whisper that beared the weight of years past.

‘I need your love’

Richie doesn’t realize he’s been crying until Eddie tightens his grip, moves closer to Richie and leads his head down with gentle hands to Eddie’s shoulders.

“Shh,” whispers Eddie. “We’re okay.”

“And this isn’t a mistake?”

“No,” Eddie says, voice breaking. “Never has been. I was just too much of an idiot that things didn’t go as smoothly as I wanted it to be.”

“Hah,” Richie says without much power, “and I was too much of an idiot to do something about it.”

“I wouldn’t have made you done anything anyway.”

Behind them, Stan clears his throat. “Are we supposed to just watch you dance?”

Richie scoffs. “Me crying should have been cue enough for everyone to join in the hug.”

“We really didn’t wanna ruin Eddie’s mojo.” Bev stands up anyway and joins their embrace. “Well? C’mon.”

And they do. It’s a group hug for the ages. The one where everything is right, the one that is long overdue.

The one where Bill has finally taken the reigns in his life, where he’s finally set to do the things he’s been afraid to do, where he finally allows himself to be vulnerable in the world.

The one where Mike gets to be free, where he gets to see the world without the weight of a senseless responsibility chaining him to an awful small town.

The one where Bev and Ben live out their lives in the arms of their loved ones. The one where they get to put their foot down and tell themselves, “This is what I want. This is what I deserve.” The one where they know their worth and remind each other of it.

The one where Stan gets to continue his life with Patty, a life he has worked so hard on to build. The where he gets to make decisions for himself without being consumed by fear and the thought of fear. Because Stan has stood his crowd, and now fear cowers at the sight of him.

‘Godspeed your love...’

The one where Richie and Eddie finally find their place. The one where neither of them are at the *just before* of the beginning of a new life. The one where they are living in the now, unafraid of themselves, unafraid of risks.

Unafraid of love.

‘...to me’

Notes for the Chapter:

i didnt wanna say in the notes way at the beginning, because i didnt wanna look like im being discouraging, but i dont feel super confident in the way this story panned out. the pacing feels wonky, and i feel like i just nyoomed through typing the entire thing. however, though, this was still super fun to write. and im still pretty proud with what ive done here. it's my longest fic so far, so getting through this was definitely a new sort of challenge for me. still, i hope you enjoyed this!

come talk to me on my [tumblr](#)!

Author's Note:

tell me what you think! ((and if i misspelled or missed a few words)). kudos and comments but especially comments are appreciated! thank you for reading and i hope you enjoyed! more to come soon. in the meantime, you can come talk to me on my [tumblr](#)